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Syrian Front



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ISRAEL-SYRIA: Fighting on the Syrian front was at a moderate level yesterday. Both Israeli and Syrian aircraft conducted strikes.

Israeli aircraft attacked targets around Mount Hermon for the second consecutive day. According to Tel Aviv, the targets were "guerrilla" concentrations in southern Lebanon. Syrian aircraft struck Israeli targets inside the Israeli-held salient. Tank, artillery, and mortar fire also was exchanged.

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*ISRAEL: Leaders of Israel's Labor Party yesterday voted overwhelmingly to authorize its negotiating team to try to form a labor coalition that would include the Citizens Rights Movement and the Independent Liberal Party, two minor liberal parties. Such a coalition would command a one-vote majority in the Knesset, but would have the prospect of additional votes on vital security issues. A new government may be formed next week.

Labor left its options open, however, including the possibility of forming a minority government. The leadership also agreed to continue contacts with the National Religious Party, although it agreed not to offer any further concessions on the religious conversion issue.

The Labor Party's decision in effect overrode Prime Minister Meir's strong objections to a coalition with Mrs. Shulamit Aloni's small Citizens Rights Movement. Mrs. Meir stormed out of the session in protest.

Although the Prime Minister charged that a coalition with the Aloni group would bring too many doves into the government, her personal differences with Mrs. Aloni may have weighed more heavily in her decision. This apparently was recognized by the rest of the Labor Party leaders, including Pinhas Sapir, who refused to accede to the Prime Minister's wishes. Mrs. Meir, however, said she will support a Labor-Liberal coalition if Rabin is successful.

If, as seems likely, the party's central committee ratifies this decision on Sunday, Rabin will have a party mandate flexible enough to permit formation of a government to replace Mrs. Meir's in the week remaining for him to do so.

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*Because of the shortage of time for preparation of this item, the analytic interpretation presented here has been produced by the Central Intelligence Agency without the participation of the Bureau of Intelligence and Research, Department of State.

EUROPE - WEST GERMANY: The reaction in both Eastern and Western Europe to Chancellor Brandt's resignation has been one of shock and disappointment. The crisis in Bonn, coming on the heels of Prime Minister Heath's defeat and the subsequent hardening of UK attitudes toward the Common Market, President Pompidou's death, and the uncertainty surrounding the situation in Italy, has added to a general sense of malaise and drift in Western Europe.

A Soviet Embassy officer in Bonn told a US official that it will take Moscow several months to evaluate Schmidt's policies. Nonetheless, he indicated that Brandt's fall is a real problem for the Soviets.

Soviet - West German reconciliation is basic to Brezhnev's policy of detente. Brandt's exit and the fact that Schmidt has been more leery of Ostpolitik than his predecessor can only cause more concern in Moscow about future prospects for Soviet detente policy and, by extension, about Brezhnev's wisdom in relying heavily on his personal relationship with Brandt.

French officials have privately expressed concern over Schmidt's past record, which they believe clearly demonstrates that he puts more importance on relations with the US than on those with France. The recent events in Bonn will probably figure in the French presidential elections, because some of Giscard's supporters are expected to cite the Guillaume case as an example of the dangers that could be posed by Communist participation in a Mitterrand-led government.

In Italy, the media are giving considerable play to developments in West Germany, despite preoccupation with domestic matters such as the divorce referendum this weekend and the sensational kidnaping of a public official. There has been no official government reaction, but the state-controlled radio-TV network has accorded Brandt sympathetic treatment.

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[REDACTED]

One of the strongest West European reactions came from Swedish Prime Minister Palme, who lashed out at East Germany in a nationwide TV statement on May 7. Palme accused Pankow of undermining the goals Brandt had sought to achieve during his chancellorship.

The East Europeans have scarcely concealed their concern about the possible effect of Brandt's resignation on the future of detente. A Polish commentary expressed deep regret over the resignation, but it was left to the Yugoslavs to weigh in with what is probably on the minds of most East Europeans: "The harm done to peace in Europe is much greater than the usefulness of the information supplied." [REDACTED]

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VIETNAM: The Viet Cong yesterday pulled out of the two-party military talks in Saigon. The move apparently was intended to counter South Vietnam's boycott two weeks ago of political discussions between the two sides in Paris and its suspension of the Viet Cong military delegation's diplomatic privileges in Saigon. The South Vietnamese had taken these actions to protest the Communist capture of a border outpost and a general rise in the tempo of Communist military action.

Both sides recently have exchanged increasingly charged rhetoric over who is responsible for the erosion of the cease-fire agreement. The Communists apparently felt their words had to be coupled with some strong action.

Neither side presently wants to see a total breakdown of the cease-fire agreement, and each has left itself enough room for maneuver to reconvene both the Saigon and Paris talks whenever this is desired. The Viet Cong are apparently maintaining their delegation in Saigon and have stated that they are prepared to resume the two-party military talks once the Thieu government restores their delegation's privileges and freedom of movement.

Nevertheless, the events of recent weeks indicate the extent to which both sides have already discounted the effectiveness of the cease-fire mechanisms established by the Paris Accords.

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CAMBODIA: Touring Khmer Communist "defense minister" Khieu Samphan continues to take a hard line on negotiations. [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED] Samphan said in Peking in early April and again in Bucharest this month that the Communists would not negotiate with the Phnom Penh government, "no matter how the current dry season offensive turns out."

The Communist leader boasted that the insurgents control "90 percent" of Cambodian territory and thus have no reason to negotiate. He cited his own travels abroad during the dry season as indicative of the Communists' confidence in their overall military position.

Looking ahead, Samphan claimed that after a Communist victory in Cambodia, he would eventually take Sihanouk's place as "chief of state." One of the main reasons for his foreign travels, he said, was to enhance his political image for that future role. As for Sihanouk, Samphan said the Prince would be allowed to return to Cambodia but would subsequently be relegated to a figurehead capacity--an arrangement he claimed Sihanouk has accepted.

Samphan--who is winding up his visits to a number of European and African countries--believes that his trips to China and North Vietnam were highly successful, and that they strengthened the Khmer Communists' relations with those two countries. [REDACTED]

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ITALY: The Politics of Divorce

"Do you favor the abrogation of the law of December 1, 1970, Number 898, concerning the discipline of cases of dissolved marriages?"

This is the question Italians will be answering in the referendum on divorce this Sunday and Monday. Many Italians who have strong feelings about divorce will be puzzled over how to reflect their views with a "yes" or a "no." A majority of "yes" votes would result in repeal of the 1970 law that made divorce legal in Italy.

More is at stake than the fate of a specific law. The battle over divorce has widened the split among Italy's ruling parties, and the outcome, which is expected to be close, could affect the Communist Party's drive for a role in the national government.

Divorce at Last

The law that brought legalized divorce to Italy was passed in 1970 after a long and bitter parliamentary struggle between church-oriented and anti-clerical forces. Catholic activists promptly collected enough signatures to schedule a national referendum on whether to keep or repeal the new law.

Most political leaders were nervous about a plebiscite on divorce, however, and were relieved when it was postponed by technicalities in 1972 and 1973. This year, efforts to postpone the vote failed despite frantic behind-the-scenes negotiations involving Christian Democrats, Communists, and the Catholic Church.

The referendum campaign began in earnest in early April. Most politicians expressed a preference at the outset for a "civil and responsible" campaign. As the campaign wore on, however, the rhetoric became increasingly bitter. Now in its last week, the contest has transcended the issue of divorce and acquired

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the air of a general political campaign. Feelings have run so high that sporadic violence has punctuated the closing days of the campaign.

The Vatican last week abandoned its "hands off" policy toward the referendum and issued a ringing statement against divorce. For the first time in the divorce fight, the Pope's moral authority was invoked. Partisans on both sides of the question have obviously decided that because the ramifications of the referendum are so important, a no-holds-barred campaign is justified to ensure victory.

Divorce Drives a Wedge

The campaign has driven a wedge between the Christian Democrats and their three center-left coalition partners. The Christian Democratic leadership spurned efforts to postpone the referendum for a third time and is campaigning hard against divorce. Many Christian Democrats are unenthusiastic about the referendum, however, and a way might have been found to avoid the contest had it not been for the intransigence of Amintore Fanfani, the veteran Christian Democrat who is again running the party.

Fanfani brushed aside the misgivings of other party leaders--including Prime Minister Rumor--and insisted on going ahead. Fanfani has been trying to tighten his personal control of the party and may see the referendum as a way to mobilize the party for coming local elections.

Many suspect that Fanfani would like to turn a victory on divorce into a more general political success. If divorce is resoundingly repudiated, Fanfani may push for an early dissolution of parliament and a new election. The idea would be to break the country's political impasse by capturing an absolute majority for the Christian Democrats--an edge not enjoyed by the party since the 1948 election.

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The other three coalition parties--Socialists, Social Democrats, and Republicans--are in favor of the divorce law. These parties share a long anti-clerical history, and they helped push legalized divorce through parliament.

The divorce dispute has fostered embarrassing ad hoc alliances between the coalition parties and the opposition parties on the right and left. In opposing divorce, for example, the Christian Democrats are campaigning on the same side of an issue as the neofascist Italian Social Movement. Since it is considered political suicide in Italy to be bedfellows with the neofascists, the Christian Democrats are trying to keep their distance. The Communists, however, are doing their best to remind the voters of this identity of interests--especially now that neofascist groups have been linked to several recent bomb attacks in northern Italy.

The three other coalition parties are also uncomfortable; they find themselves on the same side of the issue as the Communist Party. While the Social Democrats and Republicans are adamantly pro-divorce, their campaigning has generally lacked punch, apparently because of their concern at being caught in a public embrace with the Communists. The Socialists are showing less restraint and are campaigning hard. They do not wish to be overshadowed by the Communists.

Divorce as an issue has nearly been lost in the shuffle. The two dominant campaign themes seem to be antifascism and anticommunism. This polarization will almost certainly leave a residue of resentment among the coalition parties and complicate their efforts to come to terms on bread-and-butter issues in the future.

The Communist Stake

The Communist Party worked harder than any other to avoid holding the referendum. [redacted] [redacted] the party feared it had more to lose

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than to gain from a divisive fight over divorce. Communist leader Enrico Berlinguer has been trying since October to maneuver the Christian Democrats into accepting his offer of an "historic compromise." Under this strategy, he openly aided the government through the party's influence with organized labor and in parliament, while at the same time arguing that the time was ripe to admit Communists into the national government, since the coalition parties accepted such support.

Berlinguer tried to get Christian Democratic leader Fanfani to go along with a plan to cancel the referendum. Fanfani's refusal to cooperate encouraged militant Communists who all along have doubted the wisdom of Berlinguer's search for a modus vivendi with the Christian Democrats.

In many ways, the referendum has become a personal struggle between Berlinguer and Fanfani. Both men know that their prestige--within their parties and with the electorate generally--is on the line. Accordingly, they have been the most vigorous campaigners.

Cloudy Prospect

None of the participants is confident of the outcome; most believe the vote will be close. The outcome is made more uncertain by the novelty of the referendum device in Italy and by the uncertainty about whether the public perceives the contest as a vote on divorce, as a contest between left and right, or as a showdown between church and state.

Perhaps crucial is the fact that the question on the ballot is worded in an obscure way. The voter must mark his ballot "no" to keep divorce, and "yes" to reject it.

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Until recently, the polls consistently showed a slight majority in favor of divorce. The "un-decided" category, however, has swelled from 6 to 21 percent in the past few weeks. This development probably indicates that the Italian voter is increasingly inclined to cast his vote on issues other than divorce.

If the margin of victory is narrow, it will be difficult for either the Christian Democrats or the Communists convincingly to portray the vote as an endorsement of their positions on other issues.

A major victory for the pro-divorce forces would encourage Communist chief Berlinguer to keep up his pressure for an accord with the Christian Democrats and would strengthen the hand of those Christian Democrats who are sympathetic to Berlinguer's bid.

A big win by the antidivorce forces would expose Berlinguer to criticism from many Communists who have harbored doubts about his drive for better relations with the Christian Democrats. In addition, the influence of Christian Democratic leader Fanfani--already the most powerful single politician in Italy--would be greatly enhanced.

A convincing win would provide Fanfani with an even stronger position from which to deal with the other coalition parties and with the Communists, and might embolden him to seek a new election. Speculating about Fanfani's motives has long been one of Italy's national pastimes. Some observers believe he wants a mandate to push for institutional reforms that would create a stronger executive branch, which he would head as its first incumbent.

The campaign has already added to tensions within the governing coalition, and the political stocktaking after the referendum could well lead to a change of government. Regardless of how the vote comes out, the Christian Democrats will retain the initiative, and if the government falls, they will

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probably try to set up still another center-left coalition with the Socialists.

But the record of center-left coalitions over the last decade is unimpressive, and a Communist win on Monday could--over the long term--increase the pressure for a broader coalition, including the Communists, to deal with Italy's pressing social and economic problems. A referendum victory for the pro-divorce forces, however, would not in itself prevent the Christian Democrats from continuing the center-left coalition in the post-referendum period.

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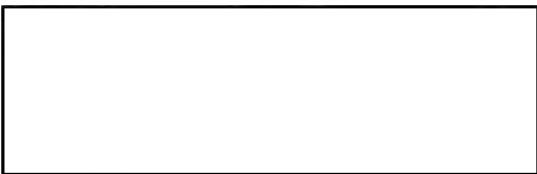
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